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Third United Nations Conference on the Least Developed Countries

Letter dated 28 September 2000 from the Permanent Representative of Bangladesh to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General

I have the honour to transmit herewith the text of the declaration adopted by the tenth annual Ministerial Meeting of the Least Developed Countries, held at United Nations Headquarters on 18 September 2000 (see annex).

I would like to request that the present letter and its annex be issued as a document of the General Assembly, under agenda item 102.

(*Signed*) Anwarul Karim **Chowdhury**
Ambassador and Permanent Representative
of Bangladesh to the United Nations and
Coordinator of the Least Developed Countries

00-67131 (E) 091000

Annex to the letter dated 28 September 2000 from the Permanent Representative of Bangladesh to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General

Declaration adopted by the tenth annual Ministerial Meeting of the Least Developed Countries, held during the fifty-fifth session of the United Nations General Assembly

New York, 18 September 2000

We, the Ministers of the Least Developed Countries, having met at the United Nations headquarters during the 55th session of the General Assembly, on 18 September 2000,

Recalling the Ministerial Declaration adopted on 29 September 1999 during the fifty-forth session of the General Assembly,

Also recalling the Declarations of the Least Developed Countries adopted during the WTO Ministerial meeting in Seattle and the South Summit in Havana on 29 November 1999 and 14 April 2000 respectively as well as the Communiqué by the Ministers of Trade of the Least Developed Countries adopted at UNCTAD X in Bangkok on 13th February 2000,

Stressing the importance of the Third UN Conference on LDCs (LDC III) to be held in Brussels from 14 to 24 May 2001,

Taking into account the outcome of the first session of the Preparatory Committee for the Third United Nations Conference on the Least Developed Countries (LDC-III),

Welcoming the adoption of the United Nations Millennium declaration by the Heads of State and Government during the Millennium Summit in New York,

Having assessed progress in the implementation of the Programme of Action for the Least Developed Countries for the 1990s, solemnly declare the following:

1. For LDCs, the 1990s has been a decade of continuing poverty and marginalization, while at the same time fundamental changes in the global economy resulting from globalization, liberalization and interdependence and the rapid advances in science and technology have engendered unprecedented increases in prosperity in developed countries. Against this background, it is a matter of grave concern that despite vigorous political and economic reform efforts, LDCs, as a group, were neither able to benefit meaningfully from these global trends and developments nor meet the goals of the Paris Programme of Action for the 1990s. It is quite telling that no LDC has been able to meet international targets set for 2000 by major recent global conferences. Globalization and liberalization has seriously challenged the capacity of LDCs to adjust to a new and more competitive international environment.

2. The Third United Nations Conference on the LDCs (LDC-III) provides the opportunity to redress the plight of the world's most vulnerable peoples by adopting a global new deal, as proposed by the Secretary-General of the United Nations at UNCTAD X, that brings to bear the fruits of human progress and knowledge, as well as the

required financial resources to the beneficial integration of the LDCs into the global economy. Socio-economic progress in LDCs cannot be achieved, without a genuine restoration of partnership between LDCs and their development partners, particularly the developed countries, on the basis of human solidarity and shared responsibility.

3. We reaffirm our commitment to pursue macro-economic and sectoral policies conducive to promoting growth and development and eradicating poverty in our countries. We underscore that the progress in economic transformation made by LDCs in the 1990s, albeit inadequate, has been primarily due to the wide-ranging reforms undertaken by our countries under most difficult domestic and external conditions. We note with grave concern that the numerous declarations, promises and commitments in favour of LDCs have, to a great extent, failed to be materialized. As a result, the benefits from national policy reforms and adjustment programmes adopted by LDCs themselves were not fully realized. In some cases, these even have had a negative impact. The situation has been aggravated further by adverse external circumstances facing LDCs. Nevertheless, we will continue to make efforts to create conditions for improved implementation of national policies and external support measures for economic growth and diversification, social progress, and sustainable development.

4. We welcome the United Nations Millennium Declaration adopted by the Heads of State and Government during the Millennium Summit in New York, in which they undertook to address the Special needs of Least Developed Countries, in particular, the call on industrialized countries to take specific actions in the areas of market access, debt relief and Official Development Assistance (ODA).

5. We welcome the timely actions by the Secretary-General of the Conference for the convening of the preparatory process with the participation of all stakeholders, including representatives from LDCs, of the first Intergovernmental Preparatory Committee (IPC) for the LDC-III meeting in New York form the 24 to 28 July 2000, and fully endorse its outcome. We note with appreciation the progress and the continuing efforts being made regarding preparations at the country, sub-regional and regional as well as the inter-agency levels. We call upon all parts of the UN system and other relevant international organizations to fully participate in the process of formulating the new Programme of Action and its implementation.

6. We note that there are numbers of pending issues to be considered during the preparatory process and that these can not be examined fully at the second preparatory session alone. We, therefore, support the recommendation of the first session of the Preparatory Committee to convene an additional meeting of the preparatory committee to consider the pending issues. We request the General Assembly to endorse this recommendation and urge the Assembly to make available adequate resources for the participation of representatives of Least Developed Countries at this additional meeting of the Preparatory Committee as well as at its final meeting in April 2001. In this regard, we urge the Assembly and the Secretary-General to make available adequate funding for convening this meeting.

7. We reiterate the need for the effective participation of the LDCs in the preparatory process and in the Conference itself and in this connection note with

concern the slow progress in the mobilization of resources to this end. We express our appreciation to the development partners who have provided resources towards LDC-III preparations, and call upon all bilateral and the multilateral development partners to provide the necessary resources to the Secretary-General of the Conference for this purpose.

8. We stress the importance of strengthening the linkages between the formulation and implementation of the new Programme of Action to be adopted at LDC-III and the activities related to the follow-up and implementation of the major United Nations conferences and summits held so far and to be convened in the future, including high-level international intergovernmental event of financing for development. We strongly underline that the mobilization of external resources for LDCs, particularly relating to ODA, debts, market access, FDI and the building of productive capacity should be at the forefront of the agenda of the Conference.

9. The effectiveness of LDC-III and its outcome in addressing the development concerns of the LDCs will critically depend on the quality of preparations, follow-up and implementation. In this regard, we strongly stress the need to provide adequate human capacity and financial resources to UNCTAD, as the focal point for these activities, through the provision of regular budget resources of the United Nations. It is deeply regrettable that the level of regular staff resources in UNCTAD for the secretariat unit for Least Developed Countries (LDCs), Landlocked Developing Countries (LLDCs), and Small Island Developing States (SIDS) was slashed from 39 to 16 during the 1990s, which has had serious deleterious effects on the monitoring and follow-up of the Paris Programme of Action for LDCs, as well as other internationally agreed programmes for LLDCs and SIDS. We, however, note with appreciation the interim measures undertaken by the Secretary-General in the context of the regular budget for the biennium 2000-2001, including the deployment of staff resources that were allocated by the 54th session of the General Assembly. In order to ensure continuity in the preparatory process and effectiveness of the follow-up and implementation of the outcome of LDC-III at the national, regional and global levels, we recommend that the 55th session of the General Assembly fully restore, at a minimum, the level of resources allocated to the secretariat unit for LDCs, LLDCs and SIDS by the 45th session of the General Assembly following the LDC-II in 1990, in keeping with the high priority accorded to LDCs.

10. We express our appreciation to the former Executive Secretary of the Third United Nations Conference on Least Developed Countries and Special Coordinator of the Division for LDCs, LLDCs and SIDS (*Ms. Anna Kajumulo Tibaijuka*) for her contribution in the preparations leading to LDC-III, and in this regard, urge that this role be filled as a matter of urgency and on a permanent basis in order to ensure continuity in the preparations for LDC III.

11. The review of the implementation of commitments undertaken in the Programme of Action for the 1990s is a major task before LDC-III. In particular, objective assessments need to be made as regards commitments in the areas of Official Development Assistance (ODA), debt, investment and trade, which have not been

implemented as agreed. Far from providing LDCs with substantially increased external financial resources – as committed under the Programme of Action – and meeting the agreed targets of ODA, donor assistance has fallen to historically low levels in recent years. The resulting shrinkage of resource availability was further aggravated by rising debt overhang and falling commodity prices. This, in turn, has immensely complicated the task of eradicating poverty in LDCs, which remain the poorest segment in the entire human society. The few donor countries, which have continued to give high priority to LDCs in their ODA allocation, and meet or exceed ODA targets, deserve our deep appreciation. In the absence of meaningful external private flows, increased availability of adequate and sustained levels of external official financial resources is critical to LDCs' own efforts to jump-start and sustain growth and development. We call upon development partners, in particular those who have not yet done so, to meet their commitments under the Programme of Action by substantially increasing the level of aggregate financial support to LDCs.

12. The heavy debt burden and debt-servicing obligations continue to have negative impact in social and economic development of LDCs and further undermine the ability of LDCs to mobilize external private flows. Without immediate debt cancellation, growth prospects and development of LDCs will continue to be bleak. In this regard, we commend the recent initiatives to significantly reduce debt of HIPCs, the majority of whom are LDCs. We consider this to be an important step in the right direction, marking a clear improvement over the original HIPC framework. However, despite such efforts, substantial alleviation of LDCs' debt burden is yet not in sight. We reiterate our appeal to all creditor countries and institutions to expeditiously cancel all outstanding debt owed by all LDCs.

13. We also urge for urgent efforts to collectively improve the productive capacities and to address the supply-side constraints, including through the development of physical and institutional infrastructure and human resources and enhanced competitiveness, faced by LDCs in order to pave the way to sustained and sustainable development. In this regard, we continue to urge for the early and effective implementation of the Integrated Framework for Trade- Related Technical Assistance to LDCs.

14. In world trade, the marginalization of LDCs accelerated in the 1990s. Strengthening LDCs' capacity to fully and effectively participate in the multilateral trading system should be an important part of international efforts to integrate LDCs into the world economy. Accession of LDCs that are not yet members of WTO to that organization should be put on a simplified fast track to complete the process within one year of application. The special and differential measures in favour of LDCs should be rendered binding by making them an integral part of the rules and disciplines governing the multilateral trading system. We call for the immediate granting of bound, duty-free and quota- free market access for all products of LDCs by all their trading partners. We stress that in implementing existing multilateral trade agreements and in future negotiations, the international community should ensure that the obligations placed on LDCs are consistent with their level of development and capacity to carry out such obligations.

15. We note that the process of globalization and liberalization poses serious risks and challenges to the Least Developed Countries, especially the most vulnerable among them, and emphasise the importance of further improvements in the LDC criteria to make it reflective of structural weakness, impediments to human development, constraints to integration into the world economy, and vulnerability to environmental ecological changes and natural disasters, as called for by the General Assembly resolution 51/183 of 16 December 1996. We stress the need to give greater weight to economic vulnerability index (EVI) in determine qualification for graduation from LDC status and the necessity of examining the costs of graduation and other implications on the sustainability of development that would result from the exclusion from the list of LDCs. We urge that the question of graduation of any LDC should be deferred until the refinement of the criteria is completed. We call upon the LDC-III to review this matter.

16. The developing land-locked and Small Island Developing States are facing geographical constraints in transit-transportation aspects in integrating their economies with the international trading system. Following the previous UN conferences on LDCs, the specific transit-transport issues of land-locked LDCs should be adequately addressed in the preparatory process of the LDC-III. In this connection, we express full support to the convening of a Ministerial-level Meeting of the Land-locked and Transit Developing Countries and Representatives of Donor Countries and Financial and Development Institutions.

17. The growing number of humanitarian and environmental emergencies, natural disasters, and the onslaught of fatal diseases such as HIV/AIDS, malaria, tuberculosis and other communicable diseases have continued to ravage many LDCs. We stress that addressing these concerns should form an integral part of sustainable development plans of affected countries and communities. International cooperation to address emergency situations and strengthen the response capacity of these countries is of great importance. In certain cases, particularly in dealing with medical emergencies in LDCs, the implementation of agreed Intellectual Property Rights (IPR) regimes must be accomplished with a human face: LDCs should be given flexible, differential and supportive treatment under all IPR regimes. We call on bilateral, intergovernmental and non-governmental organizations to continue to make genuine contribution for supplementing national efforts in tackling humanitarian emergencies and natural disasters.

18. We recognize that information revolution is having a widespread impact on traditional economic and social relations. The technology gap between developed and developing countries, in particular the least developed, has become an important factor which is contributing to their increasing marginalization. Amid an exponential growth in the field of information and communication technology (ICT), the Least Developed Countries have remained at its periphery. Lack of infrastructure, lack of capital to invest in the rapidly evolving, and often costly technology, and lack of human resources and other capacity to absorb the highly technical and knowledge-intensive domain have left most of them lagging far behind in the ICT revolution. It is recognized that increased flow of information can improve peoples lives not only by its direct impact on productivity, but also through alleviation of poverty, playing a role in better education, health, nutrition, and timely management of disasters. The international community has

special role in bridging the digital divide and working for the right to universal access of information and knowledge as global public goods.

19. We express our appreciation to the Prime Minister of Bangladesh, Her Excellency Sheikh Hasina and to the Government for the continued leadership and coordination of the LDCs in various forums, and request the Prime Minister to continue to play this important role, including taking up with other Heads of State or Government and international institutions, issues relating to LDC III during the critical preparatory process.